

Department of Veterans Affairs – Office of Survivors Assistance
“Helping Our Survivors Through Their Time of Transition”

For everyone, the death of a loved one is a life changing event – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Survivors Assistance (OSA) is here to assist survivors in making the necessary transition with benefits assistance.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said “Taking care of survivors is as essential as taking care of our Veterans and military personnel.” He added, “By taking care of survivors, we are honoring a commitment made to our Veterans and military members.”



Debra A. Walker
OSA Director

The Office of Survivor Assistance (OSA) was established in October 2008 by Public Law 110-389, Title II, Section 222, and is the primary advisor to the Secretary on all matters related to policies, programs, legislative issues, and other initiatives affecting Veterans’ survivors and dependents of survivors.

OSA monitors VA’s delivery of benefits to survivors, makes appropriate referrals to VA offices for survivors seeking benefits and explores innovative ways of reaching survivors who are not receiving VA benefits for which they are eligible to receive. Some of these benefits include, but are not limited to, education assistance, home loan guaranties, health care insurance and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC).

“We are your advocate to ensure fairness, equity and appropriateness of all survivor benefits and to serve as the liaison for inter- and intra-agency collaboration and coordination on survivor issues,” said OSA Director Debra A. Walker. “We are also fully committed to staying in step with the needs of survivors to advocate for the survivor community.”

To fulfill its mission, the Office of Survivors Assistance has been working closely with senior VA leadership to provide up-to-date information on the issues faced by the survivor community. Always at the forefront, OSA gleans much of its information through direct interaction with the survivor themselves.

On many occasions, OSA is called upon for assistance with an individual’s claim. While the thrust of OSA operations calls upon it to serve in a policy capacity, OSA staff knows that every VA employee has the responsibility and privilege to provide the excellent customer service that our clients so deserve. On any given day, OSA staff may be found rolling up their sleeves, and working the issues of individual survivors who have contacted OSA directly.

As a rule, OSA sees these service opportunities as mutually beneficial; the survivor obtains the necessary assistance with their particular issue, and OSA benefits by reviewing the trends in requests for assistance, which helps identify possible gaps in programmatic services. Strategy-wise, by working on the micro level, OSA is better able to advise VA leadership at the macro level.

OSA has also established multiple partnerships with the Department of Defense agencies, Veterans Service Organizations and other non-government organizations to explore ways to ease the transition of survivors into the VA system, and to make a difference in survivors' lives.

OSA was a key driver in the addition of the term "survivors" to the title of the informational 2009 Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors Book, which was symbolic of VA's commitment in advocating for survivors both inside and outside of VA. It spearheaded updates to the benefits book by clarifying the language regarding bereavement counseling for survivors, which will ultimately make counseling more accessible for all survivors. OSA maintains a Web site to help survivors navigate through resources that may be available to them, and will continue to monitor policy and legislative issues as well as pursue outreach to survivors to ensure that survivor issues are fully understood and addressed at the appropriate level.

"It is our mission to make sure Veterans' survivors do not fall through the cracks as VA's mission to serve those who have borne the battle is not over when Taps is played. More information can be received by calling 202-461-1077 or visiting our Web site at www.va.gov/survivors. If you would like to write us, contact us at officeofsurvivors@va.gov.